Texas Department of Health The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

September 5, 2002

TDH Hot Topics



TDH Responds to West Nile Virus.

The Department of Health is responding to public concern about west Nile virus (WNV) with a management plan including Zoonosis, the State Office of Epidemiology, the Laboratory, and the offices of Governmental Relations and Communications. TDH held a news conference on Aug. 15, and Dr. Sanchez spoke at the Houston-Harris County news conference on Aug. 21, after the death of a Houstonite from what is believed to be WNV.

TDH began a statewide WNV public-education campaign on television and radio, in English and Spanish, on Monday, Aug. 26. The campaign stresses how people can protect themselves and urges them to "Remember the five D's":

- 1) DUSK and DAWN are mosquito-feeding times; avoid going outdoors, if possible.
- 2) DRESS appropriately wear long sleeves and long pants when outdoors.
- 3) DEET is the best repellant for mosquitoes.
- 4) DRAIN any standing water around your home.

We have also initiated a new statewide WNV information line at 888-883-9997. For indepth information updated daily, there is the website: Texaswestnile.org. We are continuing to provide most current information to news media. As of Tuesday, Sept. 3, there has been one human death due to WNV (Harris County), with a total of 38 human cases (in counties including Dallas, Harris, Trinity, Jefferson, Orange, and Montgomery), as well as 134 horses and 182 birds. For more information, contact Jane Mahlow, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255, or e-mail jane.mahlow@tdh.state.tx.us.

Region 4/5 Update on WNV.

On Aug. 15, Region 4/5 North staff teamed up with staff from the UT Health Center at Tyler to participate in a public forum providing information on WNV. The regional director and the regional veterinarian presented information on the current outbreak and animal transmission and distribution. The regional manager of the Environmental Health program provided information on mosquito control and risk reduction. *For more information, contact Dr. Paul McGaha at (903) 533-5230, or e-mail paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us.*

WNV in Region 9/10.

A human case (50-year-old male) was confirmed in San Angelo, with an onset of Aug. 14. No mosquitoes or birds submitted for testing from Region 9/10 have been positive for the virus. The Zoonosis Control Program in Region 7 has experienced a huge increase in calls and consultations on WNV. We continue to investigate an increased number of animal rabies cases. TDH issued a press release on Aug. 19 on the high number of rabies cases within PHR7. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us; or contact Kevin Coker, Zoonosis Control Program, at (915) 834-7780, or e-mail kevin.coker@tdh.state.tx.us.



TDH To Present Legislative Appropriations Request on Friday.

TDH will submit its 2004-05 legislative appropriations request for a total of \$3.581 billion at 1:30 p.m. this Friday. The request will be presented to the staff members of the Legislative Budget Board and the Governor's Office. This is the department's opportunity to provide a brief explanation and to answer questions about what is presented in our request, including the 18 exceptional items. The exceptional items total \$308.5 million. For more information, contact Machelle Pharr, Chief Financial Officer, at (512) 458-7640, or e-mail machelle.pharr@tdh.state.tx.us.



Business Improvement Report.

A report detailing the department's agency-wide endeavors to improve business practices was presented Tuesday, Sept. 3, to the state auditor, Health and Human Services Commissioner Don Gilbert, and members of state leadership offices. In a 10-page overview, the report describes the agency's comprehensive approach to business improvements. It provides a deeper look into how TDH is improving its underlining structure. The report also includes an itemized update of the 94 recommendations made in the *Business Improvement Plan* last September. The new report has been posted on both the Internet and Intranet TDH websites. *For more information, contact Gary Bego, Chief Operating Officer, at* (512) 458-7375, or e-mail gary.bego@tdh.state.tx.us.



Groundbreaking ceremony for new TB treatment facility.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held Aug. 29 at TDH's Texas Center for Infectious Disease (TCID) in San Antonio. Speakers included state Sen. Frank Madla of San Antonio; Mario Anzuldua, M.D., chair of the Texas Board of Health; Eduardo Sanchez, M.D., Texas commissioner of health; and Lee Reichman, M.D., a renowned tuberculosis expert and author. The new 75-bed in-patient facility will replace the State Tuberculosis Hospital and constitutes the largest new construction of a TB facility in the United States in 50 years. In 2001, Texas had 1,643 cases of TB, an increase over the 1,506 cases reported for 2000. For more information, contact Doug McBride, TDH Press Officer, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7524, or e-mail doug.mcbride@tdh.state.tx.us.



Six-month mark reached with CDC Preparedness Cooperative Agreement.

Each region now has a fully staffed Epidemiology Response Team, funded by this Cooperative Agreement. Each team, consisting of an epidemiologist, a public health nurse, and a public health technician, has received orientation and some training. The teams will improve our capacity to detect diseases and to respond to outbreaks in the region, and they'll support our local health department partners. Hiring of one planner per region is under way; they'll lead regional efforts towards integrated community bioterrorism response plans. Contracts, which will provide our local health departments with needed preparedness dollars from this CDC fund, have been executed with 50 of 55 eligible local health departments; the remaining five have been signed by TDH and are awaiting signatures by local officials. All 65 TALHO Health Alert Network sites are in place, hooked up and operational; via it, all TDH and CDC health alerts and advisories are now being sent to local health departments. We expect its expansion to 82 TDH regional sub-offices and clinics to be completed in October. For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, State Epidemiologist, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219, or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.



Completion of new lab building progressing.

The central plant serving the new lab building is complete, as is the finish-out of floors 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. Substantial completion of the 5th floor is expected at the end of September, as sophisticated controls and equipment necessary for the Bio-safety Level 3 lab on the 5th floor had to be designed and installed. Other delays are due to unanticipated functional improvements to the air-handling system, completion and testing of the dionized water system, and incompleteness of the data and voice cabling to the worksites and modular office systems, without which the laboratories will not be able to perform their work efficiently. On the plus side, moving and installation of lab and computernetwork equipment has begun, and we expect to start moving people into the new building in mid-September, to be completed by early December. When we are done, about 330 staffers will occupy the building in 147,000 square feet of finished-out space. For more information, contact Bruce Elliott, Director, Division of Microbiological Services, at (512) 458-7760, or e-mail bruce.elliott@tdh.state.tx.us.



TDH leadership for state strategic health planning.

On Aug. 13, TDH released the *Health of Texans* report to the public. The report is a comprehensive summary of health status data including behavioral health risks, chronic and infectious diseases, maternal and child health, injuries, dental health, and environmental health. As a state health status assessment, it's Part I of the *Texas State Strategic Health Plan*. On Sept. 1, we released the *Public Heath Improvement Plan-Texas State Strategic Health Plan Part II*, which was approved at the July BOH meeting. These documents are the start of a process to bring together partners in the state public health system to define public health improvement goals for the state. As stated by Dr. Sanchez, "Without such strategic planning, we cannot make measurable improvements in the public's health in this century. TDH can provide the leadership and planning to better coordinate these planning efforts to create a culture of health and fitness in Texas." A later agenda item today will address more about how the strategic planning process will unfold this year. *For more information, contact Rick Danko, Director, Office of Strategic Health Planning, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6566, or e-mail rick.danko@tdh.state.tx.us.*



State immunization ranking improves.

The 2001 National Immunization Survey data was released by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Aug. 1, 2002. These latest CDC data reveal that Texas moved up 5.4 percentage points from its place in the 2000 survey. Texas is no longer in last place nationally in vaccinating its children who are 19 months through 35 months of age. Our state now ranks 42nd among the 50 states, with a vaccine coverage level of 74.9 percent for four doses of DTaP, three doses of polio, and one dose of a measlescontaining vaccine. For more information, contact Jan Pelosi, Director, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, or e-mail jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us.



Statewide Obesity Task Force Update.

The Statewide Obesity Task Force, an external task force funded through a three-year CDC grant, has drafted a "Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas." The draft plan was presented at a stakeholders' meeting on Aug. 8 in Austin. Approximately 120 stakeholders attended the meeting, representing a diverse group of organizations that included parks and recreation, the food industry, health professionals, media, schools, and government agencies. Stakeholders were invited to comment on the draft state plan, which targets the prevention of obesity among children and their families. The input from this meeting is being compiled and will be utilized by the task force to revise and finalize

the draft plan. Prior to this meeting, the goals and objectives for the plan were presented in a series of 10 forums around the state to get feedback from a variety of communities. The plan will be finalized by the end of January 2003. For more information, contact Mike Montgomery at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3408, or e-mail mike.montgomery@tdh.state.tx.us.

TDH in the News



Media Calls Intensify.

The TDH Office of Communications has managed 434 media calls since the last BOH meeting. More than half were inquiries on west Nile virus. Dr. Sanchez and Dennis Perotta were interviewed by the *New York Times* for a national story on "preparedness" to run in September. For more information, contact Marsha Canright, Director, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7400, or e-mail marsha.canright@tdh.state.tx.us.



Immunization Media Campaign.

The 2002 Immunization Media Campaign began July 29 in five media markets: El Paso, Corpus Christi, Rio Grande Valley, Houston, and San Antonio. The campaign emphasizes the need for timely vaccination at the ages of 2, 4, 6, 12, and 15 months, and asks parents to ask their doctors if their child qualifies for the Texas Vaccines for Children Program. The markets were targeted because of the low immunization levels in children 36 months old and younger, along with a good enrollment level of providers in the Texas Vaccines for Children Program. The campaign was aired on both television and radio and in both English and Spanish. The campaign ran through the end of August. For more information, contact Lupe Mandujano Garcia, Program Director, Communication and Training Program, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6021, or e-mail lupem.garcia@tdh.state.tx.us.



Perinatal HIV Social Marketing Campaign.

HIV/STD Health Resources Division staff is working with Sherry Matthews Advocacy Marketing to develop media materials designed to encourage women with HIV infection or at risk for HIV infection to get early prenatal care, including a test for HIV and/or treatment to reduce the likelihood of perinatal HIV transmission. Staff are utilizing the focus-group information gathered by SUMA Market Research as well as input from community-based organizations, local health departments, and other TDH programs to develop these materials. Once developed, the materials will be piloted in the Houston and Lufkin/Nacogdoches areas this fall. For more information, contact Greg Beets, HIV/STD Health Resources Division, at (512) 490-2535, or e-mail greg.beets@tdh.state.tx.us.

Disease Outbreaks / Investigations / Recalls



"Mystery" Illness in an Irving Family.

The cause of the unusual illnesses experienced by several members of a single family in Irving may be due to *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* and *Chlamydia psittaci*. Two children in this family were found Aug. 14-18 comatose or dead in their bedroom. Lung tissue from the teenage girl who died is positive by polymerase chain reaction for mycoplasma. Her siblings also have serologic titers suggestive of recent mycoplasma infection. In addition, one sibling has serologic evidence of a recent *Chlamydia psittaci* (psittacosis) infection. For more information, contact Jeff Taylor, Manager, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail jeff.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us.



Pertussis Death in Region 1.

In July, a culture-positive 2-month-old white infant in Region 1 died after battling pertussis in the hospital for more than three weeks. Her symptoms began on June 15 at 5 weeks of age, and she was admitted about a week later with paroxysmal cough, apnea, pneumonia, seizures, and encephalopathy. Upon admission, she was started on gentamycin and ampicillin, and specimens were collected for a pertussis direct florescent antibody (DFA) test and culture. When a positive pertussis DFA was reported 4 days later, she was started on erythromycin. The infant's 4-year-old sister was coughing about 10 days before the infant's cough began. An 11-month-old baby in her uncle's household began coughing about the same time as the infant, and within 12 days, the infant's brother and all of the eight other household members in the uncle's family were also coughing. Prophylaxis was initiated for the infant's four household members, her grandmother, and the nine members of the uncle's household. The infant's family and her uncle's family all attended a wedding in Region 1 on June 15. On June 28, Region 1 staff sent a letter regarding possible exposure to pertussis to everyone on the guest list for the wedding. No secondary cases have been identified from these exposures. For more information, contact Laura Tabony or David Bastis, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7284, or e-mail laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.



Tularemia Outbreak

The Region 2/3 Zoonosis Control Program was the lead on a tularemia outbreak in wild prairie dogs shipped to a Texas commercial exotic-animal distributor in Lewisville. About 250 of an estimated 3,600 prairie dogs passing through the facility died from mid-June through Aug. 1. Region 2/3, CDC, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and Denton County Health Department investigated the distribution of the tularemia-infected and -exposed prairie dogs to several states and several countries in Europe, tracing prairie dogs into and out of the facility, notifying other states about infected or exposed prairie dogs shipped to their pet stores, and keeping in contact with the manager of the export facility, who was in New Zealand. CDC notified the European countries. Region 2/3 also assisted CDC personnel with the collection of specimens from the facility and is working with USDA-APHIS in the cleaning and disinfecting of the facility. All prairie dogs distributed to Texas pet stores have been secured, killed, and tested for tularemia. Serologic testing has been done on 14 exposed humans; one had a single elevated titer of antibody to *F. tularensis*. During the past month, Region 2/3 has addressed 37 media contacts.

Region 7 conducted a tularemia investigation as a result of potentially infected prairie dogs being sold in Bell, Coryell, and Williamson counties. Region 7's Zoonosis Control Program has fielded 2,632 calls concerning WNV and tularemia. More than 273 birds from Region 7 were submitted to the laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, for testing of WNV. For more information, contact Swati Avashia, Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail swati.avashia@tdh.state.tx.us.



Hantavirus case confirmed in northern Panhandle.

The cause of death of a resident of the northern Texas Panhandle was confirmed as hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) in August. The case was originally investigated as an Oklahoma case, since the man died in Oklahoma; however, the man's residence was south of the Texas state line. Region 1's Zoonosis investigators have received the Oklahoma Health Department's investigation results and have jointly conducted an

environmental assessment. This is the third confirmed case of HPS in Texas this year; all three of the cases have been fatal, and all of the victims have been from Region 1. For more information, contact James Alexander, Regional Zoonosis Veterinarian, at (806) 655-7151, or e-mail james.alexander@tdh.state.tx.us.



Tarrant County Child Dies of Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis.

The Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance staff was contacted on Aug. 12 by the Tarrant County Health Department regarding a child, a resident of Tarrant County, who died on August 10 of what is being presumed to be primary amebic meningoencephalitis, due to *Naegleria fowleri*. The child visited Cedar Creek Reservoir from July 28 through Aug. 5, had onset of symptoms on Aug. 4, and was hospitalized at Cook Children's Hospital. Specimens were collected and sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to TDH lab for analysis. This investigation is ongoing. *For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Measles in Region 3.

A 38-year-old wom from Region 3 visited relatives in Iran and was exposed to a 2-yearold nephew with measles symptoms. She returned to the United States during her incubation period, became symptomatic during the second week of July, and went to an emergency room twice prior to rash onset with complaints of fever, severe headache, and neck ache. On the fourth day after fever onset, she visited the ER a third time complaining of chest pains, and although she reports that she had a slight rash on her chest starting the day before, it was not noted at the ER visit. She was finally admitted with acute dermatosis on day 5 and remained hospitalized for five days. Although she was born in Texas, she lived in New York until age 5, in Iran from age 5 to 10, in the United States again until 14, in Switzerland until 17, returned to Iran to marry, and then moved back to the United States. She does not recall being vaccinated for measles. A specimen collected during hospitalization tested negative for the measles IgG antibody, indicating lack of prior immunity, and positive for the measles IgM antibody, confirming acute infection. Her husband had a history of measles infection, and her two children were vaccinated, one with one dose and one with two doses of MMR. The patient had attended a party that included other adults from Iran and two children, an 8-year-old with two doses of MMR and a 16-month-old who received her first dose of MMR five days after the party, prior to knowledge of the exposure. Party guests were notified of the exposure. No secondary cases have been identified. For more information, contact Laura Tabony or David Bastis, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7284, or email laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.



Aseptic Meningitis in Pecos County.

Region 9 staff investigated a cluster of aseptic meningitis cases in Pecos County. The date of onset for the first case was July 30. Four cases and one suspect have been identified. Ten close contacts are being followed. For more information, contact Sarana Savage, Communicable Disease Director, at (915) 571-4146 or e-mail sarana.savage@tdh.state.tx.us.



Pertussis in Midland and Andrews Counties.

Also in Region 9, pertussis has been detected in Midland and Andrews counties. The first case was diagnosed in Andrews County when a child from New Mexico visited its emergency room. Five contacts of this child are being treated prophylactically. Midland has had one case confirmed by direct fluorescent antibody (DFA) in a 6-year-old girl, with two more cases (ages 8 and 2) awaiting culture results. A Midland physician is

treating a 16-year-old male referred by the Midland Health Department. Thirty-one contacts are receiving chemoprophylaxis. For more information, contact Sarana Savage, Communicable Disease Director, at (915) 571-4146, or e-mail sarana.savage@tdh.state.tx.us.



Epidemiology Investigation

On Aug. 5, the Region 6/5S Epidemiology Program received a case report about a meningococcal infection, serogroup B, in a Huntsville woman. The patient died from this disease on Aug. 8. Program staff performed an investigation and worked with the attending physician and the local health authority to provide prophylaxis to close contacts. Program staff also provided information about the vaccine (which does not protect serogroup B) to the school that the patient attended. For more information, contact Huai Lin, Epidemiology Program Manager, at (713) 767-3232, or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.



Facility Investigation.

TDH assisted the Federal Bureau of Investigation in an ongoing investigation of Heart Place Hospital in Midland. TDH staff of the Health Facility Licensing and Compliance Division conducted a federal Medicare and state licensure resurvey and follow-up visit on Aug. 22. Other local, state, and federal agencies participated in the investigation. For more information, contact Nance Stearman, Health Facility Licensing and Compliance Division, at (512) 834-6650, ext. 6752, or e-mail nance.stearman@tdh.state.tx.us.



Case Investigation.

HIV/STD Epidemiology Division staff participated in a case investigation conducted by Region 8 in which an HIV-positive nurse may have exposed patients to her infection via contamination of the narcotics supply at the hospital in which she was employed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is supplying laboratory support in the form of viral sequencing to compare the virus between the nurse and another person who may have been exposed. Blood samples have been sent to the CDC for testing, and results are pending. For more information, contact Sharon Melville, Director, HIV/STD Epidemiology Division, at (512) 490-2545, or e-mail sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us.

Training/Workshops



First Annual Enforcement Workshop.

The first annual Enforcement Training Workshop for Health Facility Licensing (HFL) surveyors was held in San Antonio on July 16-17. Surveyors from around the state attended. This year's theme was "Designing the Future," with the goal of re-evaluating current practices, policies, and procedures to determine our strengths and identify areas for improvement. Topics presented by speakers included regulatory review, surveying pharmaceutical services, program operating plans, enforcement policy and procedure updates, and legal basics. Dodjie Guioa, Texas representative for the Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, attended the workshop and participated in brainstorming sessions. Surveyor Christine Cordes was presented with the first annual "Outstanding Surveyor Award." Enforcement Program specialist Joni Elliott was presented an award for "Outstanding Enforcement Casework," for work she performed in preparation of a State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH) hearing. For more information, contact Carol Vetter, Bureau of Licensing and Compliance, Enforcement and Investigations Program, at (512) 834-6665, or e-mail carol.vetter@tdh.state.tx.us.



Homeland Security Network Operations Workgroup.

Under the direction of the Department of Information Resources (DIR), TDH staff, the Director of Health Alert Network (HAN), and two members of AIS Bureau of Operations participated in the Homeland Security Operations Group. Over the course of six weekly meetings, state agencies with alert systems similar to the HAN developed plans for coordinating efforts between agencies specifically in response to terrorist threats or actions within Texas. TDH, DIR, the Texas Department of Public Safety, the Texas Department of Human Services, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Department of Transportation, and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission participated. TDH played a key role in development of the approach that was adopted by the group as Phase I of the Texas Coordinated Alert System (TCAS) plan, which will be presented to Gov. Rick Perry later this month. TDH developed state-level infrastructure maps showing the relationship between agency infrastructures. These maps will be used by all TCAS agencies to continue infrastructure development of alert systems during FY 03. The goal of the group was to identify inter-operability and redundancy of alert systems being developed as part of Homeland Security efforts. For more information, contact Jeff Peden at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6356, or e-mail jeff.peden@tdh.state.tx.us.



Epidemiology Training.

The Region 6 Epidemiology Response Team (ERT) underwent training in epidemiology and surveillance in August. The comprehensive sessions covered many aspects of epidemiology, investigation of disease outbreaks, and statistical analysis. The skills acquired will benefit Austin, Colorado, Liberty, Matagorda, Waller, Walker, and Wharton counties as the team applies these enhanced skills in disease investigations. For more information, contact Luis Gonzalez, Regional Epidemiology Response Team Leader, at (713) 767-3343, or e-mail luis.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us.



Basic Animal Control Officer (ACO) Training Course.

On July 17-18, the Zoonosis Control Program hosted a Basic Animal Control Officer (ACO) Training Course in Temple. Twenty-five students attended from animal-control agencies in Elgin (Bastrop County), Harker Heights and Temple (Bell County), Texarkana (Bowie County), Lockhart (Caldwell County), Copperas Cove (Coryell County), Luling and Lockhart (Caldwell County), McKinney (Collin County), Marlin (Falls County), Hamilton (Hamilton County), Buda, Kyle, and the Hays County Sheriff's Department (Hays County), Teague (Freestone County), Austin and Village of Point Venture (Travis County), and Cedar Park, Georgetown, and the Williamson County Sheriff's Deptartment (Williamson County). This course presented information on rabies control as well as animal control laws, zoonotic diseases, and other related animal welfare topics. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us



Geographic Information System (GIS) training program.

Region 7 staff from the Office of Public Health Practice, Disease Control and Prevention, and Information Technology participated in a Geographic Information System (GIS) training program at Temple College. Staff learned the basics of spatially analyzing data related to health, developing maps, and using data for disease surveillance and planning community health. Region 7 staff will be partnering with and receiving technical assistance from Temple College for GIS projects. For more information, contact Lisa McKamie at (254) 778.6744, or e-mail lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us.



Texas Health Steps (THS) Outreach and Informing Workgroup.

The Deputy Regional Director and the THS Manager, region 9/10, worked on the Texas Health Steps workgroup to consider cost-saving strategies for the program. The group recommended eliminating vacant positions and continuing to have TDH employees provide outreach and information services in regions 4/5N, 10 and 11. This recommendation was supported by the TDH Executive Team. The work group met again in Austin on August 15 and 16 to consider staffing recommendations for each of the regional offices. For more information, contact Marta Saldaña at (915) 834-7760 or e-mail marta.saldana@tdh.state.tx.us.

Grants



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Awards.

CDC awarded TDH \$350,000 to develop a Texas Core Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) Prevention Program. Funding began June 30 and is a five-year grant. Core objectives are to develop partnerships, conduct surveillance, update the state plan, develop an inventory of policy and environmental changes for CVD, develop strategies to address priority populations, and determine population-based activities to address CVD. CDC also awarded TDH a \$120,000 planning grant to address arthritis. An arthritis steering committee will begin the process of identifying a state task force on arthritis that will develop a state plan to address this disease. For more information, contact Jennifer Smith, Director, Cardiovascular Health and Wellness Program, at (512) 458-7670, or e-mail jennifer.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.



HIV Prevention Grant Awards.

HIV prevention awards will be announced on Sept. 6. For the first time, these awards link traditional prevention counseling and partner elicitation to prevention case management and evidence-based interventions. For more information, contact Casey S. Blass, Director, HIV/STD Health Resources Division, at (512) 490-2515, or e-mail casey.blass@tdh.state.tx.us.



Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF) HC8 Grant Awarded.

A collaboration between Region 4/5 North and the University of Texas Health Center at Tyler resulted in the center being awarded \$763,655 for use in telecommunications and interactive satellite conferencing equipment. This equipment will be used to improve public health communications throughout the region. Local health departments will have interactive classroom links with national, state, and local public health resources. These efforts are designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of health-care delivery through increased connectivity to the Internet, the provision of public access to medical information, the support of distance-learning education, and/or the provision of telemedicine services for direct patient care. For more information, contact Paul McGaha at (903) 533-5230, or e-mail paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us.



Brazos Valley Community Action Agency Grant.

The Brazos Valley Community Action Agency (BVCAA) in Region 7 was awarded a \$566,667 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to create a community health center. With this funding, BVCAA will be able to serve an additional 3,000 uninsured individuals in Brazos and Robertson counties. BVCAA is a recipient of Primary Health Care, Title V, and Family Planning funding. Region 7 congratulates

BVCAA for improving access to care in the Brazos Valley and for being awarded this funding with their first application. *For more information, contact Lisa McKamie at (254) 778-6744, or e-mail lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



New Bureau Chief for Epidemiology.

As of Sept. 1, the TDH Bureau of Epidemiology has a new bureau chief, Ernest H. "Skip" Oertli, D.V.M. A 1976 veterinary graduate of Texas A&M University, Dr. Oertli also earned a doctorate degree there in toxicology in 1985. During 23 years in the U.S. Air Force, his duties included serving as director of Clinical Investigations at Wilford Hall Medical Center and director of the Air Force Drug Testing Laboratory, as well as being the national capital liaison for the Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center. Since December 2000, Dr. Oertli has directed the TDH Oral Rabies Vaccination Program. For more information, contact Skip Oertli, Chief, Bureau of Epidemiology, at (512) 458-7268, or e-mail ernest.oertli@tdh.state.tx.us.



Electronic Benefits Transfer.

The WIC Program met with national and regional USDA representatives and five major retailer chains on Aug. 14-15 in Austin to discuss integrating WIC electronic benefits transfer (EBT) capabilities into retailer systems. Attendees viewed a demonstration of the progress to date on a joint TDH-Lowe's Pay N Save integration project and the TDH-developed grocer stand-beside system. The retailers expressed interest in additional joint efforts. USDA expressed satisfaction with TDH's efforts to integrate the EBT system with stores' systems. For more information, contact Mike Montgomery at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3408, or e-mail mike.montgomery@tdh.state.tx.us.



WIC State Meeting.

The WIC Program held a state meeting on Aug. 5-7 in Austin with a theme of "Partners for Healthier People." The agenda included such highlights as a presentation by Dr. Sanchez addressing his vision for TDH, an opening address by Anne Robinson entitled "The 'I' and 'Us' of GENIUS," and a closing speech by Tom Zimmermann entitled "Getting Fired Up Without Burning Out." The second day was devoted to breakout sessions with topics including new breastfeeding research, preventing lead poisoning, stress relief, and anger management. Two panels discussed partnering opportunities within the community. Evaluations received from many of the 300 people who attended were positive. For more information, contact Mike Montgomery, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3408 or e-mail mike.montgomery@tdh.state.tx.us.



Office of the Attorney General Briefing on Fatherhood Initiatives.

Last session, Sen. Royce West sponsored legislation directing state agencies to assess their policies with regard to their effect on a father's involvement in the family. On Aug. 7, a representative from the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) spoke with TDH staff from various programs about fatherhood initiatives at the state and federal levels. Michael Hayes, manager of Collaborations, Fatherhood, and Family Initiatives, also addressed changes in policy that have occurred on the part of the OAG and the Texas Youth Commission. For more information, contact Norma Alvarez at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2017, or e-mail norma.alvarez@tdh.state.tx.us.



World Breastfeeding Day/Week/Month.

Breastfeeding was celebrated throughout August. Breastfeeding Day was Aug. 1, World Breastfeeding Week was Aug. 1-7, and August as a whole was World Breastfeeding Month. Gov. Rick Perry proclaimed August as Breastfeeding Awareness Month. Texas WIC developed and distributed materials for the events, and local WIC agencies planned special events, either in the clinic or in the community, to celebrate the day, week, or month. Among the special events in Austin was a baby fair at Northcross Mall on Aug. 17 to promote breastfeeding and breastfeeding-friendly practices. The Central Texas Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition presented an award to Rep. Glen Maxey on the steps of the Capitol on Aug. 26 to honor him for his support of the Mother's Milk Bank of Austin; Dr. Sanchez spoke at the event. An organization called PROMoM organized a National Nurse Out for different times during World Breastfeeding Week. The Nurse Out is a gathering of breastfeeding mothers and their children who assemble to nurse and show support for the concept of breastfeeding. A Nurse Out was held in Austin at Highland Mall on Aug. 5. For more information, contact Chan McDermott at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6663, or e-mail chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us.



New Employee Orientation.

Effective Sept. 3, a new format for delivering the Austin-based new employee orientation will be implemented. This new format will include a blended learning solution by presenting parts of the training in a classroom setting and other modules via the employee's desktop computer using TDH-Online. The classroom delivery will include a welcome address by the Commissioner or a designee, the "A Day in the Life of TDH" video, a travel program, a Credit Union presentation, training on employment discrimination, training on creating a harassment-free environment, an introduction to cultural competency, and instructions for taking the on-line courses. On-line elements will include "About TDH," internal and external resources for TDH employees, safety, frequently asked questions, ethics, performance journal training, information security, benefits, and other resources such as Web links to additional information and TDH policy. For more information, contact Wanda Thompson at (512) 458-7720, or e-mail wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.



Vibrio vulnificus.

Vibrio vulnificus is a naturally occurring bacterium found in the marine environment. Oysters harvested from Gulf Coast waters in warm weather contain *Vibrio vulnificus*, which can cause serious illness in consumers with compromised immune systems. Nationally, there are 40 to 50 cases resulting in 20 to 30 deaths per year associated with consumption of raw oysters. Virtually all illnesses are associated with oysters harvested from Gulf Coast states.

In July, the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference passed an issue requiring that states reduce the number of *Vibrio vulnificus* infections related to oyster consumption. The issue requires Texas, Florida, Louisiana, and California to reduce *Vibrio* infections by 40 percent in five years and 60 percent in seven years. TDH is required to implement a *Vibrio vulnificus* management plan, which requires Texas to conduct educational activities and encourage the oyster industry to develop and implement techniques to reduce *Vibrio vulnificus* in oysters. If these controls do not achieve reduction within the time frames established, TDH must take action to achieve the goals, such as limiting harvests in warm-weather months or requiring that oysters be cooked before

consumption. For more information, contact Kirk Wiles, Director, Seafood Safety Division, at (512) 719-0215, or e-mail kirk.wiles@tdh.state.tx.us.



Quarterly Licensing Board Chairs Meeting.

The Council of Independent Licensing Board Chairs met on Aug. 16 at TDH headquarters. The Council heard a presentation by Mr. Gary Bego on current TDH activities, a report on the Governor's Task Force on Homeland Security by Julia Rathgaber, an update on the Regulatory Automation System project, and the status of the survey conducted by the Health Professions Council relating to complaint procedures among the health-care licensing boards. For more information, contact Jim Zukowski, Professional Licensing and Certification Division, at (512) 834-6628, or e-mail jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us.



Implementation of National Testing for Initial EMS Certification/Licensure.

As of Oct. 1, 2002, candidates for initial Texas certification as an Emergency Medical Technician-Basic (EMT-B) will no longer take a state-developed certification exam. Instead, they will be required to become nationally certified, which includes both a didactic and practical exam, developed by the National Registry for EMTs (NREMT). NREMT, which is currently being utilized by 46 states, will report an individua's successful receipt of national certification to TDH's Bureau of Emergency Management (BEM). Then, if the candidate meets all Texas requirements, BEM will certify the individual. This same process will be implemented for initial Licensed Paramedic, EMT-Paramedic, and EMT-Intermediate candidates on Feb. 1, 2003. For more information, contact Chris Quiroz, Team Leader, EMS Enforcement and Education, Bureau of Emergency Management, at (512) 834-6700, or e-mail chris.quiroz@tdh.state.tx.us.



Bureau of Vital Statistics Geocoded Data.

The TDH Bureau of Vital Statistics, in collaboration with Spatial Approaches to Health Outcomes (SAHO), can now provide geocoded data files for births and deaths from 1990 to 2001. This will allow GIS researchers to conduct geographic research and surveillance on any birth or death data. For more information, contact Debra F. Owens, Chief and State Registrar, Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (512) 458-7366, or e-mail debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us.



Texas Diabetes Council Meeting.

The Texas Diabetes Council Meeting was held at Texas Tech University Health Science Center in Lubbock on Aug. 15. Chancellor David M. Smith, M.D., welcomed the Council to the university. State Sen. Robert Duncan also addressed the Council and expressed his strong support for addressing diabetes in Texas. For more information, contact Jan Ozias, Director, Texas Diabetes Program Council, at (512) 458-7490, or e-mail jan.ozias@tdh.state.tx.us.



Statewide Conference on Tobacco Education Program.

Approximately 600 people attended the fourth annual Texas Statewide Tobacco Education Program (STEP) conference held July 22-24 in The Woodlands. More than 200 youths attended as well as adult chaperones, law-enforcement personnel, members of community groups, and other interested parties. Teen ambassadors participated in planning and conducting the conference. Participants were educated on how to become active in their community to address tobacco control. For more information, contact Philip Huang, Chief, Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention, at (512) 458-7200, or e-mail philip.huang@tdh.state.tx.us.



HIV Prevention.

HIV/STD Epidemiology Division staff organized a meeting held July 11-12 in Austin of TDH prevention grantees who are providing HIV prevention services to HIV-positive individuals. Five organizations are currently funded for this scope of work: the Montrose Clinic in Houston, the Resource Center of Dallas, the Laredo City/County Health Department, Special Health Resources for Texas in Tyler/Longview, and Planned Parenthood of El Paso. Also attending were the regional and central-office staff who monitor these contracts. An official from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was present to provide advice to the programs. The group shared program plans and received training (co-facilitated by staff from TDH and the UT-Southwestern Medical School) in outcome monitoring of these projects. For more information, contact Sharon Melville, Director, HIV/STD Epidemiology Division, at (512) 490-2545 or e-mail sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us.



UT-Southwestern Hepatitis C Virus Update.

TDH sponsored a one-day professional conference entitled, "Hepatitis C: The Next Century." The purpose of the conference was to give health-care providers an overview of hepatitis C as both a public health problem and as an individual health issue. Professors from the Department of Internal Medicine of the UT-Southwestern Medical Center conducted the training. For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535, or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.



Texas HIV Medication Program Budget Needs.

The Texas HIV Medication Program (THMP) continues to hold stakeholder meetings to provide information related to the THMP budget needs in upcoming fiscal years. The division director and THMP manager met with Ryan White Title I grantees in Austin, Dallas, and Fort Worth. This completes meetings with all five Title I cities. For more information, contact Linda Moore, Director, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.



Lack of Access to HIV Ambulatory Medical Care in Abilene HIV Services Delivery Area.

On July 1, the Tarrant County Health District awarded the "ambulatory medical care" subcontract for the Abilene HIV Services Delivery Area to AIDS Resources of Rural Texas, Inc. (ARRT); attempts to recruit a local medical provider for this HIV clinic had been unsuccessful. A conference call was held on July 9 among these two agencies, regional HIV staff, and HIV/STD Field Operations Branch staff to develop short-range, mid-range, and long-range plans to re-establish medical care for people with HIV disease. A plan to increase access to care for current clients was for ARRT to provide triage by the RN case manager in Abilene, with transportation to the ARRT Weatherford clinic for those clients who need to be seen by the advanced-practice nurse located there. This plan was only temporarily successful. The Clinical Resources Division coordinated a second conference call with Dr. James Zoretic, regional staff, Tarrant County, and HIV/STD Field Operations Branch. A stakeholder meeting was held in Abilene on Aug. 6 to begin developing a community plan for addressing access issues for this population; other options were also discussed to improve access. For more information, contact Linda Moore, Director, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.



ImmTrac Web Application Updated and Released.

Recent enhancements to the ImmTrac Web application should eliminate problems related to unexpected disconnection of users and viewing of existing client data. Users had been experiencing problems such as viewing screens from a previously retrieved client on the record for a newly retrieved client. Other enhancements to the application involved specific buttons for displaying messages relating to questionable matches, password changing messages, and improvements to the Immunization History Report. The updated version was released on June 28. For more information, contact David Scott, Immunization Division, ImmTrac Registry, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6433, or e-mail david.scott@tdh.state.tx.us.



General Injectables and Vaccines (GIV) to Ship Vaccines to All Texas Vaccines for Children (TVFC) Provider Sites.

The goal is to improve service for all TVFC providers in the state. At the same time, vaccine loss should be reduced because TDH will only be supplying a 45-day supply of vaccines to each provider and will be able to monitor inventory much more closely. The possibility of cold-chain failure in shipping vaccines will be reduced because the vaccines will not have to be shipped or handled as many times as before. Time spent for shipping and handling vaccines by staff in the local health departments and regional offices may be redirected to other immunization efforts, with the emphasis on improving immunization rates in children younger than 2.

The Immunization Division contracted with GIV on July 7 to ship vaccines to all TVFC sites, and GIV began shipping on July 8. In the first two and a half weeks, GIV had shipped to 787 provider sites. Currently, Regions 1, 6, 7, 8, 9/10, and 11, as well as the City of Houston Health and Human Services Department, are receiving their vaccines through GIV. Regions 2/3 and 4/5 will be filtered in by the end of September.

The implementation of the new distribution system has been a challenge for all local health departments, public health regions, and central-office staff. The department recognizes the effort that was made to implement this process and applauds the hard work that all staff made. For morel information, contact Judi Chase, Immunization Division, Vaccine Management Section, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6266, or e-mail judi.chase@tdh.state.tx.us.



Local Health Department Immunization Meeting.

More than 100 people participated in the second annual Local Health Department (LHD) Immunization Meeting. LHDs from across the state were invited to meet with the immunization regional staff and central-office staff. The focus of the meeting was to inform LHDs of changes that are on the horizon. Commissioner Sanchez welcomed the group and shared with them the top five priorities of his administration. In addition, the agenda included the new vaccine-distribution system, the upcoming Pharmacy Inventory Control System, and changes in contracting requirements. There was an opportunity for the LHDs to share with TDH staff all the things that were working, as well as those items that needed improvement, with suggestions that could be considered. For more information, contact Lupe Mandujano Garcia, Program Director, Communication and Training Program, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6021, or e-mail lupem.garcia@tdh.state.tx.us.



The Texas Vaccines for Children Program to Begin Recruiting Providers.

The Texas Vaccines for Children (TVFC) Program is placing an unprecedented emphasis on provider recruitment for state FY 2003. As of Sept. 1, all contracted local health departments are required to recruit physicians who are licensed through the Texas Board

of Medical Examiners, and who specialize in Family Practice, General Practice, or Pediatrics.

Current data indicates that the TVFC has enrolled 54.8 percent of the potential providers in these specialties. The TVFC will also be improving data collection to eliminate as potential recruits those providers who are not immunizing children. For example, Grayson County has already discovered that, of the 17 providers on its list for recruitment, eight are either retired or work as emergency-room physicians.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has announced that it will redesign the Clinic Assessment Software Application used to determine the immunization coverage levels in clinics nationwide. CDC is contracting out for this work, and the new vendor was to be announced by Aug. 21, but the process has been delayed and a final decision is expected in another month. Texas will offer full participation in testing of the new product. For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, Texas Vaccines for Children Program, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6215, or e-mail jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us.

Regional Updates

Public Health Region 1



Regional Staff Brief Officials on Emergency Preparedness.

Members of Region 1's epidemiology response team attended meetings of the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission, the South Plains Association of Governments, and the Partners in Public Health to discuss emergency preparedness, emergency plans, and other health issues with health professionals and elected officials from throughout the region. For more information, contact Barry Wilson, Regional Epidemiologist, at (806) 767-0496, or e-mail barry.wilson@tdh.state.tx.us.



Assessments of Public Health Preparedness Conducted.

Regional staff members have been traveling throughout the region to visit with county judges and other officials about public health preparedness. Staff members plan to visit every county judge without a local health department in Region 1. In addition to answering many questions and assessing each county's ability to respond in the event of a public health emergency, TDH staff have also provided each judge with a copy of the Office of General Counsel's guidelines for Communicable Disease Control Measures and are providing information regarding other funding sources for emergency preparedness. For more information, contact Diane McDonald, Epidemiology Response Team Nurse, at (806) 767-0483, or e-mail diane.mcdonald@tdh.state.tx.us.

Public Health Region 2/3



Rabies.

PHR 2/3 Zoonosis Control currently has 282 cases of animals reported with rabies this year (2002). This time last year, there were 383 rabies-infected animals reported (2001). The majority of these rabies-infected animals were skunks. For more information, contact Jan Buck at (817) 264-492, or e-mail jan.buck@tdh.state.tx.us.

Public Health Region 4 and 5 North



West Nile and Rabies.

On July 10, the regional veterinarian represented the Zoonosis Control Program at the East Texas Veterinary Medical Association meeting. He distributed maps and information on rabies and on the west Nile virus. For more information, contact James Wright at (903) 533-5243, or e-mail james.wright@tdh.state.tx.us.

Public Health Region 7



Three Rivers Veterinary Medical Association Meeting.

On July 23, the Zoonosis Control Veterinarian presented information on the west Nile virus, trends in animal rabies, and the animal rabies vaccination legal review process to veterinarians at a monthly Three Rivers Veterinary Medical Association meeting held in Buffalo (Leon County). As a result of the meeting, some veterinarians from this association have joined an e-mail distribution list to receive public health information impacting Region 7, and others have submitted bird specimens for WNV testing. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.



Veterinary Medical Association Disaster Preparedness Committee.

On Aug. 2, the Zoonosis Control Veterinarian represented TDH at the Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) Disaster Preparedness Committee Meeting in Austin. The committee learned about the CDC bioterrorism response planning and funding ongoing within the agency and throughout the state. As a result of this meeting, the participants gained insight into the funding and development of Texas' public health emergency response infrastructure. This information will help TVMA encourage private and public veterinarians to become involved in emergency response planning and programs in their area. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.



Veterinary Medical Association Meeting.

On Aug. 13, the Zoonosis Control Veterinarian presented information on west Nile virus, trends in animal rabies, and the animal rabies vaccination legal review process to veterinarians at a monthly Capital Area Veterinary Medical Association meeting held in Buffalo (Travis County). As a result of this meeting, Region 7 Zoonosis Control completed its goal of visiting all six veterinary medical associations within its jurisdiction during 2002. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.



Rabies Lecture.

On Aug. 15, the Zoonosis Control Veterinarian presented a rabies lecture to faculty and students at McLennan Community College. The students are embarking on the first semester of an accredited veterinary technician program. Attendees benefited from a review of rabies transmission, current animal rabies trends in Texas, and rabies pre- and postexposure vaccination protocols. As a result of the lecture, several students will be preimmunized against rabies in the fall 2002 semester. For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.

Public Health Region 9/10



Environmental Protection Agency Soil Survey.

The Environmental Protection Agency released the results of its soil survey conducted in El Paso in spring 2002 on July 16. Of 318 surface samples taken from 191 locations, 35 residences had arsenic and lead levels above the screening levels of 24 parts per million (ppm) arsenicand 500-ppm lead. The samples were taken in a 3-mile radius surrounding the point where Texas, New Mexico, and Mexico converge. Region 9/10 staff participated in five community meetings to discuss the results with area residents. TDH coordinated a letter signed jointly by the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District, Region 9/10, and the El Paso County Medical Society that discussed the results and enclosed educational materials for area physicians and their patients. For more information, contact Gale Morrow, Deputy Regional Director, at (915) 834-7777, or e-mail gale.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.



Border Health Institute.

The Border Health Institute (BHI) is working with the City of El Paso Planning Department to establish a master plan for the BHI campus. BHI board members met with the El Paso Empowerment Zone to develop performance measures for the Empowerment Zone grant funds on Aug. 16. For more information, contact Gale Morrow, Deputy Regional Director, at (915) 834-7675, or e-mail gale.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.



Concho Valley Council of Government.

The Emergency Response Coordinator for Region 9/10 met with the Concho Valley Council of Government to discuss the Region's plans for public health preparedness and bioterrorism response. For more information, contact Terri Escobar, Emergency Response Coordinator, at (915) 834-7754, or e-mail terri.escobar@tdh.state.tx.us.